

The Self-Taught Supermom with April Spencer

David Crabill: Welcome to the Forrager podcast, where I talk with cottage food entrepreneurs, about their strategies for running a food business from home. I'm David Crabill, and today I'm talking with April Spencer. April is a sugar artist who lives Harrod, Ohio, and she mostly focuses on custom cakes and lollipops with her cottage food business.

Spencer's sugar shop. Now, if you head over to April's Facebook page or Instagram feed, you will see that her custom cakes and lollipops are super impressive. But in this episode, you're going to hear how she really started this business from nothing, no culinary training or baking experience whatsoever.

She really just relied on YouTube to teach herself, and ever since she made her first cake in 2014, she has slowly built up her business. And now she has thousands of social media followers. You will hear her talk about what she's done to get noticed on social media and how she has built a second successful business on Etsy selling her lollipops across the country.

One thing that makes April super unique is that she has managed to build this into a full-time business while being a nearly full-time stay at home mom of young kids as well. To be honest, I am still not exactly sure how she manages it all, but however she does it. I know that her story is going to be very inspiring for many home bakers.

So with that, let's jump right into this episode. Welcome to the show April. Nice to have you here.

[00:01:21] **April Spencer:** Hi, I'm so excited.

[00:01:23] **David Crabill:** So April uh, take us back to the beginning of this adventure. How did you get started?

[00:01:28] **April Spencer:** It was my little girl's first birthday. And I knew that I wanted, to order this really big fancy cake. And then I discovered how much cakes cost and that wasn't really in our budget at the time. So I figured I'd jump on YouTube and I would try to figure out how to do it. myself.

it turned out pretty rough. But after that I started doing cakes for like all of my nieces and nephews. I have a ton of them. So I would start, I started doing their birthday cakes and then after that people started calling and asking for cakes. So it was very unprepared. Very not.

I wasn't, I wasn't planning on making a business out of it.

[00:02:11] **David Crabill:** Sure. Sure. I feel like that's how a lot of people are. Now. This is back in 2014. Yeah. So you were kind of humble about it.

but I read that this was a pretty epic cake. Can you describe what this first cake was like?

[00:02:27] **April Spencer:** So her first birthday was under the sea theme. So it was a two tier cake. I didn't have any support in it. I didn't know that I needed rods and, and support boards. Um, But it was all blue and it had, gosh, probably at least 50, 60, 70, maybe little sea creatures on it.

And coral and it took weeks if not months to make each one, like there's turtles and sharks and you know, some octopuses and all kinds of things. And. Yeah. I mean, it was, it was a pretty rocking cake, but I'm more surprised that it stayed standing. It should have never survived that entire party.

It should have collapsed on me within minutes of putting it together, but somehow it didn't.

[00:03:17] **David Crabill:** So that, I mean, you're creating a bunch of creatures out of fondant, and that doesn't sound like beginner level stuff. You said this was your first cake. I mean, did you have experience before this decorating?

[00:03:29] **April Spencer:** No, I was a really artsy kid back in high school. I won a couple of art shows and then life, you know, took me down a few different paths. And I think that's why when I started to do this cake, it didn't seem that crazy to me. And it wasn't, it was really fun. Like I just became a stay at home mom to stay home with my now, well, you know, she's eight now, but at that point she was one.

And so it was kind of cool to do like something for myself. That I was really excited about. That was kind of like what I really used to enjoy, which was art

and doing things like that. Um, And also I wasn't on a time limit. I started so far ahead of schedule that it was a really like pleasant process.

Like I was like, oh, I think I'm going to make a shark today. Or I think today I'm going to make a crab, you know? And it was, it was a lot of fun. Now I would, I would whip that cake together in like four days and maybe possibly cry a little bit about it, you know, back then it was, it was just getting back into art and really fun for me.

[00:04:36] **David Crabill:** And where were you learning how to do all of this, cause it's, I guess your first time.

[00:04:41] **April Spencer:** Yep. YouTube. I am a lover and a fan of the school of YouTube. it taught me. Everything. My sister is a cake baker in North Carolina. Um, And she sent me some of her recipes cause I was like, ah, how do I do? So she sent me some of her cake recipes. So I wasn't completely blindsided because I was not a baker.

So I probably would have ruined a couple of pans of cake if I didn't have her assistance on that. but yeah, then YouTube, I just stayed up. I'd put her to bed. My husband worked swing shift at that point. So sometimes he had to work nights. So I just stayed up and watched YouTube videos of how to do this stuff of how to work with fondant and the basics of cakes.

[00:05:28] **David Crabill:** And has that continued? Have you continued to just focus on YouTube for learning or have you learned in other ways up to this point.

[00:05:37] **April Spencer:** Still YouTube. I mean, if there's a technique that somehow, I don't know um, YouTube is my first grab. Another one is sugar geek show. I am a diehard fan of her. I subscribe, so I have full access to her website sugar geek show is a huge learning tool. Um, When it comes to that, because I mean, she does cakes that you would never even think about creating, and then she shows you step-by-step very detailed how to do them.

So whenever I have to do like a crazy sculpted cake I usually refer to sugar geek show of like base that I need to build and the support system and things like that.

[00:06:15] **David Crabill:** Yep. We had Liz on the show just a few months ago. So yeah, she does some pretty incredible work. Uh, And what are your favorite YouTube channels? like where would you guide a new cake maker? If they're looking to learn.

[00:06:30] **April Spencer:** to be honest, I don't have specific channels. I just put it in the search bar and I just go through until I find it. So not necessarily, I don't really have. Yolanda. How to cake it. She does some pretty cool YouTube tutorials that I used to watch. Um, and still do, but mainly, yeah, I just put whatever I need to know in the search bar and whatever video I finally land to where I'm like, okay, that makes sense. That's the one.

[00:06:55] **David Crabill:** So you started this out just wanting to make something for your daughter. And then when did you start to get requests from other people to make their cakes? were they the people who saw it at that first birthday party?

[00:07:12] **April Spencer:** Well, it was mainly my sister-in-law. She has five little munchkins. So she would ask if I was interested and then another sister-in-law. I think between all of us, there's like 11 kids. So that's a lot of birthday cakes to start doing. But that was a great start to that.

And then I had a couple of, I would just post them on my personal Facebook page cause I, I didn't have a business yet. And some other moms started asking me if I would make their kid a cake

[00:07:40] **David Crabill:** So were you doing these cakes for free or like at cost?

[00:07:45] **April Spencer:** Oh, Pretty much at cost. I didn't know at the time, but it was pretty much for cost.

[00:07:51] **David Crabill:** And when did, when do you feel like you started to think? Okay. I want to turn this into a real business.

[00:07:59] **April Spencer:** goodness, probably I was still just having so much fun with it. I still am having fun with it, so when I think I really realized that I needed to kind of really turn it into a business more is when when I had to start kind of.

Turning down orders, you know, cause in the beginning I was like, I'm only doing like one cake a weekend. You know, I did have a young baby. I'm only going to do one a weekend. That way it's not too crazy. And then I realized that once I really had to like start being like, oh no, I can't do that cake. Or trying to figure out how to do two and three cakes a weekend that it was time to kind of like put my big girl panties on and start a business

[00:08:42] **David Crabill:** Yeah, I want to jump ahead a little bit. You were talking about how you're trying to fit this into your schedule while having a young baby and how many kids do you have right now?

[00:08:52] **April Spencer:** three.

[00:08:52] **David Crabill:** three. And they're all pretty young, right?

[00:08:55] **April Spencer:** Yep. Eight, five and two.

[00:08:57] **David Crabill:** Okay. I just from seeing your Facebook page, it seems like you're doing this full-time. Is that correct?

[00:09:03] **April Spencer:** Yes.

[00:09:04] **David Crabill:** So how, are you swinging this business? Um, Do you, have you hired help at this point?

[00:09:12] **April Spencer:** I have hired a babysitter. Um, Two doors down is somebody else who makes cupcakes. And she has a young or an older daughter than my girls. And she comes down and babysit. That's been a lifesaver this summer with all of like the COVID reschedules uh, you know, there's weekends where I have three and four and five weddings, and I would have never, ever gotten through it without Lucy.

We call our neighbor Lucy, she's our, she's one of our favorite human beings. Um, But she comes down one day a week and lets me get kind of like all of my cake baking done that day without really being interrupted. But I mean, Prioritizing is really the biggest thing. I mean, in the beginning, when I had no idea what I was doing, you know, I barely slept, it was really crazy.

Um, especially as the business started to increase. But then I started meeting with other businesses and learning different techniques. Like I cannot say

enough about HoneyBook. That's a thing that I use. Um, It helps cut out a ton of that communication by having like emails set up in my brochure, my pricing list and all of that stuff set up that it's just like a click of an email away instead of having.

And the beginning, the amount of conversations, like very long drawn out conversations you know, that really started to take a toll of like family time and fun time with the kids. So really trying to streamline all of my processes. And then other than that, I don't sleep well.

It's yeah. Saying no is a big one too. I had to learn how to say no. Once my quota was full, but I'm lucky I have great kids. they know how to occupy themselves because I've been doing this since, you know, since I started when Sof was one you know, this is not new to them. They know that they're not allowed to throw a ball in the house.

Cause if it lands in a wedding cake everybody's in trouble. so I'm, I'm lucky with that. But yeah, really just streamlining the processes. And now moving on to wedding cakes, I do a lot more wedding cakes, which makes life a little bit easier.

You know, I have to deliver on the weekends which can add a little bit of difficulty, but my oldest goes with me to open the door. She gets paid a dollar wedding and she'll, she gets to ride along and she opens the door for me so I can help carry the cakes in. And so just trying to kind of like add them in on different aspects helps a lot with, with getting to spend time with them and still run this crazy business.

[00:11:52] **David Crabill:** Yeah, that is crazy. I mean, you were talking about how you hired help, but then you said it was only one day a week that you have Lucy come over. So you're really a full-time stay at home mom in addition to running this business

[00:12:06] **April Spencer:** Yes.

[00:12:07] **David Crabill:** that, I mean, that is remarkable considering how much work you get done just from what I can see on, on your social media channels.

Um, very good tips in there about how to prioritize. And you said HoneyBook is the software that you use to kind of manage everything.

[00:12:24] **April Spencer:** Yep. Yep. HoneyBook is a really cool program. It is \$40 a month, but you can go on and they've got deals all the time, but you literally send them in their concierge service. You send them in your, you know, your price sheet that you've already made up. They make it up into a brochure for you. You add in some pictures.

And then literally somebody will either go to my website or my Facebook and they will hit the contact us button. And I have it directly linked where it goes straight to my HoneyBook form. So they fill out date, theme delivery, what they need, things like that. And then it automatically sends them a brochure with everything that I offer.

So after I, okay, so it kind of takes a whole bunch of that middle communication out that kind of can really draw out the process before. That's where I was having issues with is I'd have people contacting me and they want to talk about themes and what they want and this and that. And I'm trying to pull out like, well, what date do you need?

Because me saying yes is totally dependent on the date. And if I have it available and, you know, if I'm already super busy, is it a color scheme that already goes with the color scheme that I have for another cake to help streamline that process. So to get all of that information upfront directly with HoneyBook or even if you want to do a Google form, I started with a Google form.

You know, that really helps take out. Hours of your valuable time that you can use actually baking and decorating cakes?

[00:14:00] **David Crabill:** Yeah. In terms of getting the, kind of the business side of this in place, it sounds like the baking side came really easily and I'm gathering that you had not run a business before this, Correct.

[00:14:13] **April Spencer:** Correct.

[00:14:14] **David Crabill:** So, was it difficult to kind of put the business pieces in place or did that come easy to you as well?

[00:14:20] **April Spencer:** In the beginning it was very hard. Uh, it was very hard trying to set office hours. You know, I that's something that for my family and for time with my husband and time with my kids, I needed to set office hours and I needed to really stick to them. That was something that made running this business, not so overwhelming.

You know, Brides and couples and uh, you know, right in the beginning, like, Hey, I sometimes don't answer my phone from like Thursday to Sunday, if it's not super important, unless it's your wedding weekend because I'm currently giving all of my time to the brides and the couples of that weekend, that if I do have time, I will, we can text, we can get back and forth really easy, or I try to answer emails in the morning.

But other than that I can't have a two hour phone consultation with you on a Friday when I'm doing all of this stuff for the wedding on Saturday. So setting like those boundaries. And then once I really started getting into the wedding industry, that's where I talked to you, like lots of venues and photographers and started to figure out what business things that they put in place to make their lives a lot easier.

And that's how I heard about HoneyBook and square and things like that.

[00:15:43] **David Crabill:** So I know that.

you do a lot of wedding cakes. Now, when did you start to pick up the wedding cakes? Cause that's kind of a bit more ambitious in terms of when it comes to making cakes.

[00:15:55] **April Spencer:** Goodness, I want to say I did my first wedding. Three years ago, because I was petrified of doing weddings. It wasn't doing the wedding cakes. It was transporting the wedding cakes that like, I was like, Nope, no way. Absolutely not. I'm not just like, I don't want to destroy a couple's special day. Like having somebody cry in front of me and tell them I ruined their lives.

Like I just, that was, so that was the hump that I had to get over with to really break into the weddings.

[00:16:32] **David Crabill:** And how did you manage to get over the hump?

[00:16:35] **April Spencer:** I found cake safe on YouTube. I was looking for ways to transport a cake and that was something that came on cake safe. I love them. You is this amazing box and you put a steel rod down the middle of the cake and they have awesome videos. Like they take a key all the way to France and do a whole bunch of other stuff.

But once I knew that I could get a cake in my minivan with two kids at that point and it could get from point a to point B and I could get rear-ended and everything would be okay. Like that was, that was probably the very first big business. I would say business purchase that I did because most cake safes, they're around like three, \$400 and that was like the very first, like real, like I have to do this, this makes sense kind of step for me.

And I live out in the country. So a lot of my cake venues, I mean, they're not like right down the street from me. some of my I'm lucky and I have some that are just 30 minutes away, but then I have some that are regular clients now that are almost an hour and a half away.

So I probably would, I probably just, would've never done it. I probably would've been like, Nope. Wedding cakes. Never.

[00:17:51] **David Crabill:** So do you wish you had started wedding cakes sooner?

[00:17:55] **April Spencer:** No, no. Cause I'm glad that I got to go through the process of doing all of the birthday cakes and getting that structure technique down. That is so important for when a cake has to stand in the middle of the room for six and eight hours at a time. And then also, I didn't do HoneyBook until I started doing weddings and I actually used square for a little bit in the beginning.

I'm glad I didn't do. I didn't. I'm glad I didn't do the wedding cake sooner because it probably would have been a big jumbled mess. HoneyBook makes me look really professional. it makes me look like I'm really on top of my, my stuff was sending contracts and things like that because it does make it so much easier.

And so I'm glad I didn't do wedding cakes beforehand. Cause brides can be somewhat. They can be pretty demanding. Not all the time. I'm lucky I have,

I've had very, very few bridezillas. Usually it's the mother-in-laws so, but yeah I'm glad that I waited.

[00:18:56] **David Crabill:** we're talking about wedding cakes and I would say, I mean, that's really, it's really not doing justice to you to say that you're just a cake maker because you're really also a sugar artist uh, seems like almost all of your cakes have some level of sugar art added to them. Can you talk a little bit about how you got into the sugar art world?

[00:19:17] **April Spencer:** Yeah. Yeah. I wanted to make lollipops for one of the kids' birthdays, and I was really excited about it. I learned how to do it at home. And then I started an Etsy business and I was working with sugar every single day. At that point I actually still did cakes as under cottage law at home.

And then I kind of started a second business of the lollipops, where I started to rent out a commercial kitchen space because here in Ohio, if you ship anything across state lines, it has to be done in a commercial kitchen. There is a slight in-between where you get your home bakery license. But you can't have any pets and we have rescues and I was a vet tech before I was a sugar lady.

So there's no way I was going to get rid of my animals to do that next step. So, and even with the home bakery license, it's really weird, you know, it, I used your website a ton to figure out what I could or couldn't do. But in the home bakery clause, for some reason, if you are a home bakery in Ohio, you can ship like cupcakes and cookies and anything across state lines, as long as you get inspected.

But for some reason, lollipops aren't on that list. When I asked why she says, I don't know and that I would need to rent commercial kitchen. So I started to rent a commercial kitchen, but I just loved the sugar aspect of it. you can do so much with sugar. It's also super temperamental two degrees too high and it starts to turn orange, you know, two degrees too low.

It doesn't set up and it doesn't get hard. And you know, the 30 minutes that you just took to slowly boil it is all for nothing. So I like a challenge and I like to do things that other people are too scared to do. I've kind of always taken risks like that, except with wedding cakes. But, yeah. So when I started to work with it every day, and then I started to do wedding cakes as well, I wanted to figure out how to incorporate those.

And then it just really, it really took off. It was at that point in my life. My mom had gotten sick from breast cancer for the first time. And I had just started to do styled shoots. I had never done them before. So it was a really, great like creative outlet for me that I needed at that point.

Because you know, that's how I get my stress out is, by being creative and getting do things like that. And once I started, adding cake and melted sugar together, That's when, Wedding Day magazine contacted me and wanted to do, you know, wanted to do it on their blog and things like that.

And then just one thing kind of led to the other then during the pandemic, you know, the world shut down a little bit, unfortunately, and I did have to close that side of the business, the Etsy side, just because I don't have that daycare anymore. So I can't get to a commercial kitchen as much as I would need to.

But it's still nice that I have the option of adding it to my wedding cakes and um, most, a lot of brides, they get lollipops for their place settings um, which is really fun, you know, to still use that aspect of it all the time that my favorite is like a clear lollipop with gold leaf at it. Like it's just, it just makes every place setting, like, just so cool and classy.

So it's just, it's nice to just be able to. Use all of these things that I have, that I really like to do and smash them all together and people like it.

[00:23:04] **David Crabill:** I was going to say, I mean, if you didn't mention it, that these are not your average lollipops, they look really impressive. You know, perfectly clear and they really stand out and it did. I mean, how long did it take you to really perfect that lollipop?

[00:23:21] **April Spencer:** Awhile. I didn't start with clear lollipops just because it was so difficult to get them perfectly clear. So I don't use isomalt um, which is an option that is great for people to use. It was just a little bit too expensive for the route that I wanted to go. So, I mean, I used straight up sugar, corn syrup a little bit of cream charter and some water, and then you just sit there and you have to be patient.

You can't rush the process. I have burnt many of batches, many, many batches. And I still do like a week and a half ago, I had a pot of boiling sugar. It boiled over because I got impatient and I was like, I can bump the heat up a little more. And then I paid for it, you know? So it's really, it took time.

It definitely took time to find that sweet spot of where it was still clear. But it set up enough, you know, especially at the time when I was shipping them, not only did you know, it's not like I could just make them the day before, so they would stay perfect. I was having to make them like a week or two weeks to include shipping ahead of time.

So I had to just figure out the perfect the exact perfect temperature and process to use.

[00:24:34] **David Crabill:** Yeah. I want to dig in a little more into this Etsy business because a lot of people ask me about that. You know, how can I sell on Etsy? How can I ship across state lines? You know, and you know, typically they need to use a commercial kitchen. So what was the learning process like for you in terms of getting on Etsy, getting into a commercial kitchen what'd you have to go through and learn to, to get that.

[00:24:58] **April Spencer:** The biggest piece of advice is whenever you are contacting the agricultural department, which is who runs, cottage law in Ohio, and then, you know, your home bakery business, and then upwards a commercial kitchen is make sure that even if you call and ask the question to then email them the same question and make sure you have it in writing cause different people in different places.

You know, when I'd call the health department asking them a question about the cottage law business, they were like, I don't know. so people do their jobs and they do their jobs well, but they don't do other people's jobs. So you kind of have to figure out and go through and figure out what department you need to ask.

What questions to. I was very, very lucky and I contacted my health department to ask them about a commercial kitchen. Don't ever be scared to that's the biggest piece of advice I can give to somebody at least around here in Ohio. You know, we are very lucky. If you have a question, just call them.

Like, don't be scared. I hope it's like this for everybody, but

[00:26:05] **David Crabill:** It's not.

[00:26:06] **April Spencer:** Oh, I'm sorry. So sorry. At least here. they don't appear to be out to get us, like they want to help you as, as much as possible.

So I called them. I don't, you know, the nearest rental facility for a commercial kitchen was an hour and a half away.

And that wasn't, you know, adding that time into my profit margin, because I mean, you have to add your time in there too. Like it's just not product. It's also time. and then I got really, really lucky cause another baker friend of mine, she said that I needed to contact her old employer, which is the meeting place on market street in Lima. And they were great. And they were like yes, we'd love to rent our kitchen to you. Um, you know, they had Sundays available. So she was great. I went in, I kind of did a little interview with her. I signed a, you know, a little contract. I had to do my safe, serve stuff to show um, you know, that I was allowed to be in the kitchen by myself and get all of that, like the safety and the food serving and all of that process. And then it was cool to see my certificate up on the wall in there.

Um, yeah, so I would go and I would rent that kitchen and I would be there for 10 and 12, sometimes 15 hours to get whatever lollipops I needed to get done at that time. Then I moved to a restaurant closer to here. Um, once the pandemic hit that way um, when things started to calm down just a slight bit, and then that way I was able to, it was a bar.

So they were only open in the afternoon in the evening. So I was able to go there a couple of days during the week, during the day to really start getting my orders done. Because there was a massive influx with people wanting to sell and ship lollipops.

[00:27:55] **David Crabill:** Yeah, it's good to hear how you found your commercial kitchens. Cause you said you're rural and that's kind of the challenge. And I think a lot of people just think you gotta have a rented kit, like a commercial kitchen that just only rents their kitchen full time. Um, but there are actually commercial kitchens all over the place.

And it's good to hear that you're able to work things out. So as you set up this business, I mean, you had to get things set up with the ag department or the health department. You also had to pay for the commercial kitchen. How much did you invest in terms of money into getting your Etsy business off the ground?

[00:28:34] **April Spencer:** So the commercial kitchen ended up being \$15 an hour. And then for a slight moment there, I did have some friends coming in to

help me um, package things because it got so crazy um, was shipping out orders. That was nice. Cause they, they, you know, I'd swap out for a kid's birthday cake.

You know, cause I just, I knew I wasn't going to need help for super long amounts. I knew it was going to slow down eventually. Um, so I just needed like quick help. So I spent money on branding, like having somebody make me up a nice logo getting packaging tape, cause everything with Etsy is how it looks, you know, at that point I'm still part of my business is a home business.

And then part of my business is a commercial business on Etsy and I needed to not look like a home business anymore. Like I needed it to not look like I went on Canva and made up my own logo. Like I needed to pay somebody for like a branding package. That was where a lot of financially um, Etsy, my money went in Etsy.

I cannot stress this enough when it comes to Etsy. Etsy tells you what they want you to do. They tell you, they send you emails. They tell you, you know, they send you surveys. You know, if you get on an Etsy Facebook group, don't be petrified by all of the unhappy people. All of the unhappy people are there because they're unhappy all of the happy people aren't there because they're packing packages to ship out.

but Etsy, I mean, when they tell you they're gonna roll out a new program, You need to be the first one to jump on board, you need to not fight it. You need to not be upset.

This is their platform. They're allowing you to use it. This is how you're selling your product and getting out to millions of people that you wouldn't be able to get out to originally. So if they tell you that they want you to start advertising, you say, okay, and you figure out how to do that.

And if you need to increase the cost of your lollipop or whatever, you're going to sell by 10 cents a lollipop, you just do it. You know, that's, that's the biggest thing about Etsy is that they tell you what they're going to do next. And you can either try to fight it, or you can try to jump on board.

And they, they tend to show lots of appreciation to people that jump on board.

[00:30:53] **David Crabill:** Now, when you launched your Etsy business, how did that go? Like, how did you have. Of orders at first or did it take a long time for the orders to ramp up?

[00:31:05] **April Spencer:** I was excited about getting like one order a month in the beginning. And then it turned into one order a week. And everybody thought I was ridiculous. Like, why are you boiling sugar and selling it? Like, this is a lollipop. Nobody's going to spend \$3 on a lollipop. And so trying to get over that hump mentally it came to be, I want to say it was another kid's birthday.

And I got a message from Etsy saying that they were going to roll out the advertising portion of it, where you could pay for ads. It was like, I want to say it was like 50 bucks or a hundred bucks. And then you got a free 100 bucks in advertising through Etsy. And I remember talking to my husband about it and you know, he's like, maybe you should just stick with the cakes.

Like you're really busy with the cakes and, the lollipop thing isn't really like heading off. And P.S. He's super supportive. It's just, we talked, we talked through all of this, he's my soundboard. But I was like, before I close this down, I'm going to pay for the advertising and I'm going to really, I'm going to give it a shot.

I'm going to give it a good shot. And I did, and it was worth it. I started to get like two orders a week. And another thing with Etsy. This isn't really dealing with Etsy. This is dealing with your customer. You don't want to buy from a store that. One sale. Nobody, nobody feels comfortable with that.

That's when I really started to see a difference when I hit the big number milestones, when I hit 50, when I hit 100, when I hit 500. And then when I hit a thousand each one of those milestones, I could see a big jump in the amount of orders that I received because people were less hesitant to buy for me.

So quick little note, if you guys have a square and you do orders like that, connect your square account to your Etsy account. Yes. You're paying Etsy and extra 20 cents out of whatever cake that you did, but it adds those tally numbers onto your Etsy account and it helps it grow. And it helps. So like I was able to sell cakes and people were able to leave a review on my Etsy for the cakes or the cupcakes or whatever else that they did, but then it would also

add that good review and that tally mark onto my Etsy account that helped out a whole bunch.

So that helped out like in the very, very beginning when like, I'm like, nobody's really ordering, I only have like four sales. That was something that I connected and I didn't even do it on purpose. I connected them. I want to say, cause I thought about making up a square website and I realized that it could go once it got synced, the sales from one added onto the other in the tally mark region as well.

So that's, if you're starting an Etsy business, that's a huge help. Like that is a giant help and nobody talks about it and I don't know why. So there's a, like, that's something that really helps people when they start.

[00:34:01] **David Crabill:** Let me just clarify that, that I heard that right. That you're getting a tally for orders that didn't even happen through Etsy.

[00:34:08] **April Spencer:** Right. Cause once you sync your Etsy and your square Etsy still takes like the 20 cents or at least this was how it was a year ago. Etsy still takes 20 cents for processing that order. cause it's done technically through Etsy and square once you link them together. So yes, like somebody would pick up a cake, but since I was running my other, like when I was syncing them together and running them under one financial thing, then yes, when I would sell a cake and they would pay, it would add as a sale onto my Etsy banner.

[00:34:39] **David Crabill:** That's very interesting. I had never heard that before.

[00:34:43] **April Spencer:** Yes. And it was a huge help. Like, I mean, that's, It's basically how my Etsy business got started is by getting those, you know, by getting those numbers up is really, really what helped.

[00:34:54] **David Crabill:** I know that you shut down the Etsy business when the pandemic had just cause you can't couldn't manage both. But what was that business looking like at its peak? How many orders were you getting per week?

[00:35:08] **April Spencer:** Oh gosh. Um, I was, when I was going to the restaurant, I was shipping out probably 30 to 40 boxes a week. And very rarely were they like a single order? They're almost like a double or triple order. Now

granted That's when people were shipping things like crazy because they couldn't see each other in person and things like that.

So before that, we'll take it back. Even before that. And I was still probably shipping out probably 20, 20 to 25 boxes a week.

[00:35:41] **David Crabill:** And each of these boxes has at least a dozen lollipops in it.

[00:35:45] **April Spencer:** Yeah. I would say very rarely did I get a single order

[00:35:48] **David Crabill:** so are you thinking about maybe starting that up again once the pandemic thing eases up.

[00:35:54] **April Spencer:** I am very interested in that. You know, a big thing that we had to deal in the wedding industry is not being able to have weddings for so long. And then they all got rescheduled into this year. I only ever had the intention of taking. One to two wedding cakes a weekend. And with, I didn't have to cancel a single, I didn't cancel a single wedding cake.

I let everybody reschedule, even if it means that I was a sinking ship a little bit. so with that, that's another part of the reason why the Etsy business had to take a little bit of a standby is because the wedding business that I only wanted to have one or two wedding cakes, a weekend turned into having a three and four and five wedding cakes a weekend.

So there wasn't really any of that time to devote to the Etsy business, but I've got two in school this year. So probably when the third one's in school here in a couple of years if it's still a thing and lollipops are still going strong, then I might jump back on Etsy business.

[00:36:56] **David Crabill:** the other thing I noticed, I mean, you've done the Etsy thing and I can tell you invested a lot into getting that off the ground and you pulled out all the stops, but you're also super duper strong in the social media front. Uh you've got thousands of followers and it seems like you're posting every single day.

And, and you got a lot of personality behind your social media presence. Uh, So what can you share in terms of what you've learned about marketing through social media?

[00:37:27] **April Spencer:** Um, just being, you, you have to be you. I just went to a big marketing conference last weekend. And Number one, spend the money, you know, just spend the money. Um, if you need a light box to take better pictures start off with the cheapest crappiest one on Amazon for like \$20. And then when your business starts to pick up buy the hundred dollar one that can fit bigger and better things in it. And get Lightroom. There's a free version of Lightroom that you can purchase and for you to edit your photos, or even if you don't want to mess with Lightroom, just Instagram in general, it has enough pass on the filters, go on the settings and the edits of like brightening a photo and clarifying it to make it really look, really nice. I think most of the time when I get a call from a couple or from a potential order if they've just looked at the pictures and they haven't like read my info, they don't know that I'm a home baker.

You don't have to run your home business like a home baker. You can run your business, like just a business. So put your money into um, the things that make it look really professional. That's, what's been the biggest help for me on social media also. Styled shoots. If you, especially in the wedding industry, if you don't do so shoots, you need to jump on the train.

That's how you get beautiful pictures of beautiful cakes, because believe me, it is really hard to sometimes hunt down wedding photographers, to get your pictures of your cake. Usually you only get like probably one or two snaps of your cake because their focus is the couple and things like that.

So doing a styled shoot and putting it into your contract as a styled shoot of getting good photos and having a booklet of your photos that you can choose from and show on, share and share on social media has been something that's really, really helped me. Uh, Another part is we run. A little mini farm now.

And uh, before that we had struggles of selling our house um, before the pandemic started and then living in my in-law's basement and searching for a house. And like people get invested in your story. they want to know you. Um, You know, if you don't feel safe telling your kids names, you know, you don't have to ever say their names on social media or, you know, you don't feel comfortable with letting everybody know where you live.

You don't have to put that out there. But those are the biggest things that is making your photos look as nice as possible and then, and your stories or things like that.

Be a person I got so many messages and you know, somebody would order a wedding cake and be like, oh my God, I love seeing your goats. Or I would deliver a wedding cake. And the mother-in-law would be like, how is your baby ducks doing? You know, people, people want to know who you are and they're investing in, in you.

you know, they're buying from a small business because they want to know that that's where their money's going to, like, you're going to help me feed my goats and my kids are going to soccer practice because of you and just being human. For so long, it was important to not show any of that human side. And I think now it's one of the most important things that you can do.

[00:40:53] **David Crabill:** Yeah. I noticed that you, you know, you don't look like a home business in terms of your work, but you make a point of telling people that you're a home business, it's like in all caps on your descriptions. Um, Do you want people to know that? Like why, Why are you so upfront about the fact that your home business.

[00:41:12] **April Spencer:** Well, number one legally here, you have to be super upfront about that. You have to let people know that you are a home-based business. That is something, and that's something that I just want to be transparent about because there are some people that don't want to order from a home business and that's totally fine.

But once your payment goes through, you're not getting it back. So um, so so I want to be upfront about that as humanly possible in the beginning. Also because. People show up at my house. And that's never a cool feeling like one was really weird. I had somebody walk. I had these two women just walk into my house.

And that was a super crazy feeling one day. And it wasn't, it wasn't a good feeling. It was a horrible feeling. We got a security system after that, like their excuse is. Well we thought you were a business? Well, you can clearly tell that this is a house. You know, and then we've had just, some people stop by and once they pull in, they realize that I'm not a brick and mortar store.

But they still knock, which is okay. But I'm answering the door in my pajamas. I don't look good. I've just gone out and done chores and fed the animals. And that's not necessarily the. the face that I want to put on, if I'm going to do your

six tier wedding cake at that point. So I just want to be super, you know, my kids and my home safety is number one priority about that.

So I feel like if I, if I can shout that from the rooftops, then that helps that not happen as much. but, but mainly that point, and then also, in all of whenever I introduce myself on Instagram or Facebook, you know, I let it be known that I'm a homemaker and I let it be known that I am, you know, they learned everything from YouTube and I never went to culinary school or anything like that.

Just because I want everybody else to know that they can do it. Like you can be a stay at home mom and you guys cannot be financially. My husband's always had a great job, but when we were got together, he was just starting out at that job. So once I quit my vet tech job we were struggling a little bit, especially with wanting to do things that weren't necessities like a big first birthday cake.

I want other people to know that they can do it too. Like it's, it's community over competition here. Like you're not going to take my business away. I've got my business established. I have my clientele. So. I feel like everybody should start a home baking business that they can, like, if you want to stay home with your kids and try to make some money, like start a home baking business.

[00:43:52] **David Crabbill:** Yeah. That's interesting comment that you feel like everyone should start a home baking business.

[00:43:57] **April Spencer:** Okay not everybody.

[00:44:00] **David Crabbill:** do you feel like it works a lot better for certain types of people from what you've seen in the people you've interacted with?

[00:44:08] **April Spencer:** Yeah. You have to be kind of spastic. And I'm not a very organized person, but I've had to be because of this business you have to be creative. you know, obviously you have to be clean, you have to worry about the small details. Um, But I mean, I think if you really try, like a ton of people that I see are other home bakers that do really, really good at it.

They never thought they'd be a home baker. Like I didn't grow up baking. Like my favorite cake is yellow box mix with chocolate frosting because that's my childhood. Like that's what my grandma made us. And that's, will be and forever. Be like my favorite, if you want me, if you want me to like ask what my

favorite dessert is, it's that I didn't grow up in this house where we, we baked on the weekends and did all that kind of stuff.

So, I don't want the I've never baked before to be scary for somebody who's thinking about doing it. Cause that's not the baking part's kind of a site and you can find all of that science on the internet. You can find all of the recipes and things like that, but you know, the creative part. Is actually the harder part. I feel like,

[00:45:21] **David Crabill:** I do want to go back to the social media stuff. We kind of went off on a tangent there um, because I know you went to that social media conference. You obviously doing a great job with social media. how has your follower, I mean, You have thousands of followers now, how has that grown over the years. And have you done anything to like, try to boost the number of followers that you have on the social media platforms?

[00:45:47] **April Spencer:** My Facebook. I call it my OG mom group. my, my diehards from the beginning, they, I think, I think Facebook's up to like 3,500. But I find that Facebook is more of my direct local people. Like those are the people that I'm going to sell to directly. They're going to pick up birthday cakes, they're going to ask for lollipops at their wedding.

They're going to do this and that. And most of those people have really been there. Like, there's a good portion of them that have been there since the beginning, Instagram. I really tried t o push Instagram when I was doing lollipops, because Instagram was getting me those Etsy orders from all over the US so if I was going to do a local sale, I would put that only on my Facebook.

So now that Etsy's done, it's just kinda, it's just all for cakes.

It's all for cakes and lollipops that are local. But it definitely has a little bit, like I get contacts from like magazines or TV shows or things like that from Instagram more than I do Facebook.

[00:46:57] **David Crabill:** Why not just put all of your content on both platforms.

[00:47:02] **April Spencer:** I would do that except I did find out like if I would put a local sale up on Instagram, sometimes people would order and then they'd be like, oh, you don't ship. Even though up there. I think that's even in my bio

that I don't ship on Instagram. some people read instructions and some people don't um, where I never really had that problem on Facebook.

[00:47:25] **David Crabill:** So you've been contacted by wedding magazines. I know you mentioned one earlier but that's helped build your business.

[00:47:35] **April Spencer:** Yeah. Yeah. So I was really lucky and um, the Christmas cookie decorating challenge, they found me through Instagram. I made it to the final interview, but didn't get selected. and that's something too, when it comes to social media. Even though I didn't make it all the way there, everybody around here still thought that was super cool.

So. even when it's not a complete success, still share that stuff because like nobody from Beaverdam or Harrod, Ohio had ever been contacted by the competition show. Like they didn't care if I didn't make it on to the final app, like to the episode, they still just thought it was cool that like someone around here was even considered

[00:48:15] **David Crabill:** I was going to say it's probably only a matter of time before you'll make it.

[00:48:20] **April Spencer:** hope so I'm excited. Like that would be that's something that's probably on it on, on one of my to-do lists. I wouldn't mind doing like a competition show. I think that'd be fun.

[00:48:31] **David Crabill:** from the body of your, it seems like you have a very specific artistic style um, very elegant style. Is that something that you mimicked or that you just developed over time on your own?

[00:48:45] **April Spencer:** when I started to do styled shoots, I found a lady who did styled shoots, who would send me the style board and then tell me to do whatever I wanted. And that is how I really got to find. What I wanted to do is when I started doing wedding cakes, a lot of them, they still kind of wanted, they hadn't seen a different colored wedding cake in person.

and that's kind of what I wanted to break into. Like, I didn't just want to do plain white wedding cakes. So finding this person that did styled shoots. And then her letting me do whatever I wanted that's when I really like started to find my groove.

[00:49:29] **David Crabill:** How did you get into those styled shoots?

[00:49:31] **April Spencer:** Uh, A wedding photographer messaged me and asked me if I wanted to get in on one. That's the very first one started to go. Um, Well the very first one that I got asked to do, I said no, because I had never heard of a styled shoot. And I was like, you want a free cake? What, what do you, what?

Then I did my research and found out what they were about. And yeah. And so my name kinda got Passed around to other photographers that I'd be willing to do styled shoots. and that's how I got into them.

[00:50:04] **David Crabill:** So can you break down a little bit about what you have learned in terms of pricing your products? And I actually, I know you do cakes and lollipops, but you do other things. So what, what do you sell through your business and how has it changed over time?

[00:50:22] **April Spencer:** um, I offer the tiered wedding cakes and different sizes, half sheets, cupcakes, cakesicles, decorated cookies um, lollipops with images on them. I did, I busted out and got the Eddie edible printer. So now I can print your pictures on your wedding cookies.

That's something that's really starting to take off decorated donuts, a whole bunch of stuff. And it used to be crazy enough. The list used to be bigger, but that is something that I have had to learn to do is to trim down some things like if you have this on your price sheet and you only sell it once a month or once every other month just get rid of it.

Because whenever it was time that I had to do that, one thing that I didn't do very often, it was kind of, it started to kind of be an annoyance because I had to stop everything else that I was doing that I had kind of like this awesome assembly line for, to do this thing that I didn't do that often. So trimming down your price sheets and trimming down, the things that you make is always a really good idea if it gets too crazy.

[00:51:33] **David Crabill:** I was going to say, I mean, you do fantastic wedding cakes and it seems like you could just focus on the wedding cakes and nothing else. what causes you to venture out and do all these other things?

[00:51:46] **April Spencer:** So I am the only person here in locally that offers such an array of things. So that has been my things with my wedding venues. They really like the fact that they can just say, you know, I've worked with them enough time. They know I'm good. They know I'm on time. They know what their couple orders is, what they're going to get.

But instead of having to send them to a cake lady and a cake pop lady and a cupcake lady and a cookie lady, they can just send that one to me. and I'm gonna do my best job that I can possibly do. So that was. The niche that I took care of around here um, that really helped me get into the wedding scene and do so well.

[00:52:31] **David Crabill:** And how has your pricing changed over time?

[00:52:34] **April Spencer:** A lot, a lot, a lot especially with wedding cakes because it is it's not just a cake for that day. It is an experience like there is, you know, I said earlier, you have to put your time in there. You have to charge for your time, you know, was it comes to a birthday cake. It's usually a five minute conversation.

And then I see you on the day that I pick it up. I'm going to send you a reminder, email or I text, and we're good with a wedding cake there's tasting days. And. At least on average, two to three consultations and they usually ask, you know, they can last, the first one usually lasts anywhere from an hour to an hour and a half.

And then the second one for final details is about another hour. And then a cake tasting in there where they get a box of five cakes and five fillings and cookies. And so when the pricing comes to my wedding cakes versus my birthday cakes, when I first started, I was like, no, they're going to be the same, because I feel like it's horrible to charge somebody more for a piece of wedding cake than a piece of birthday cake, because it's still the same stuff.

But then like I really started to see how much time was in the wedding cake. Like it is all those phone calls. It is being available to brides and couples 24 7. Way more than you have to be for your wedding cake or for your birthday cake. So you know, really sitting down and clocking the average time that you spent with a couple you know, and, and pricing that appropriately into my wedding cakes is the biggest thing that I had to learn.

[00:54:12] **David Crabill:** So, what has been some of your favorite cakes or maybe some of your most ambitious cakes that you have delivered?

[00:54:21] **April Spencer:** Oh, goodness. Um, I have a it's four tiers of cake, but it had a geode in the center of it. Um, it was, it was cool. I got a metal piece from prop options where it was like so you could have a floating tier. And I had a bride that said, I want to do something completely different that nobody else has done.

I love geodes. What can you do? So I ended up smashing cakes and lollipops together, and I made a huge geode slice that actually went in that I had to melt onto the metal floating tier.

And that's still one of my favorites because the photographer, took a picture through the middle of the geo. So that was just like, that was like the first big, like non-photo shoot, real wedding cakes.

That was a, a stunner, like I, people will message me and ask about that cake.

[00:55:18] **David Crabill:** As you think back over the years, are there any stories that stand out to you? Maybe a memorable experience or something that really touched you.

[00:55:28] **April Spencer:** Oh when brides cry, when the couple cries, like you know, that geode cake that we just talked about when I go and deliver and they're so excited, like I get several couples now that really let me design their cake and they want to be surprised. Like that's something that's becoming a really popular thing is, you know, they'll send me a couple of pictures of things that they like, and I'll smash them up for them and create something out of it.

And then it's a really cool experience to show up to their wedding day, get it all set up and then get to present it to them. And they be just blown away. That's probably like one of the top 10 feelings. Like that's such a cool experience or like, when you're, when you're showing the bride and the entire family like comes to see it and everybody's just gasping and like talking about how cool it is. that's always the best feeling.

[00:56:28] **David Crabill:** Well, April, I know that you've, you've done so much with your business over just a few short years, and it's pretty cool to see how

busy you are and how successful you've been. Where do you see yourself taking this into the future?

[00:56:46] **April Spencer:** Oh man. So weeks I want a brick and mortar and some ways I just want to stay at home with my babies. It's not going to shut down anytime soon. I love doing it. I love being creative and it definitely gives me my creative outlet. So I'm not going to be done playing with sugar anytime soon, but maybe I'll open the Etsy shop back up when the kids are in school or maybe I'll finally do a brick and mortar or maybe not. I don't know. We'll have to see.

[00:57:18] **David Crabill:** Well, thank you so much for coming on and sharing with us today. Now, if people want to learn more about you, where can they find you or how can they reach out?

[00:57:27] **April Spencer:** um, always go to the Facebook or the Instagram. They're both Spencer's sugar shop. And then also Spencer's sugar shop.com is my website. Or you can always give me a call at 419-296-4838.

[00:57:43] **David Crabill:** Well, Thanks so much for jumping on here and sharing your story. I loved all of the insights you had about how you learn, not only the baking side of things, but also the business side of things and your, your story is definitely an inspiration to many people.

[00:57:59] **April Spencer:** Thank you. It was so much fun.

[00:58:03] **David Crabill:** that wraps up another episode of the Forrager podcast.

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